

—From "Elisha Kent Kane and the Seafaring Frontier."

"If Eskimos could live in the Arctic . . . so could white men."

ited scope of a little book of hardly two hundred pages of text. His work is a most useful contribution to the history of the period, and to an understanding of American conservatism.

2. EXPLORER

"Elisha Kent Kane and the Seafaring Frontier," by Jeanette Mirsky (Little, Brown, 201 pp. \$3), is an account of the life of a little-appreciated nineteenth-century explorer, set against the background of the American pioneering tradition.

By Raymond Holden

RECENT changes in the emphasis, purpose, and technique of exploration have left little room in the public mind for the memory of some of those great figures among explorers whose manner of approach to their work was more important than their discoveries. Among these, one of the most notable and one of the least noted was Elisha Kent Kane of Philadelphia, who died ninety-seven years ago at the age of thirty-seven.

Jeanette Mirsky, who is the author of "To the Arctic," one of the best summary accounts of Arctic exploration in general, has chosen to present, in "Elisha Kent Kane and the Seafaring Frontier," an inspirational sketch of Kane's life at the same time that she exhibits the explorer as an example of the American pioneer instinct, seafaring division. Let it be said at the outset that Miss Mirsky's choice has

resulted in an incomplete and not entirely satisfactory biography and has left the point, if there was one, about Kane as a seafaring pioneer rather shakily made. Yet since the point is relatively unimportant and there is a definitive biography of Kane elsewhere in progress, and since Miss Mirsky writes well and intelligently, her book is by no means waste motion. Her subject gives her plenty of cooperation. It would be impossible to write an uninteresting book about Kane.

Elisha Kane was born in Philadelphia in 1820 of well-to-do parents. He had a medical degree by the time he was twenty-two and at twenty-three became a surgeon in the United States Navy. His health, undermined by rheumatic fever, was not good, and the visits to tropical and Oriental countries which his naval service made possible, though they stimulated his mind and developed his character, brought him more than once to the brink of death.

In 1847 Kane got out of the Navy and into the Army, serving in Mexico while, unknown to him, Sir John Franklin was dying with his men in the Arctic. Like the Mexican War, the tragedy of Sir John Franklin was a lamentable and, it now seems, even an avoidable mistake but, unlike the Mexican War, it was positively fruitful. Out of the mystery which for many years surrounded the fate of Sir John, his ships, and his men grew the technique of modern exploration and the great explorers who developed it. Elisha Kane was one of these. When the United States Congress, occupied with problems of the extension of slavery and the admis-

sion of California to the Union, got around to heeding Lady Franklin's plea for international help in the search for her husband, Kane applied for a post with the American expedition. He got it. Though the expedition which got underway in 1850 found no trace of Franklin it turned out to be the apprenticeship of a great explorer.

Following his return to the United States Kane spent his time planning a second trip in search of Franklin and a book about his first. Early in 1853 he once more set out for the North, this time in command of his own expedition, into the planning and outfitting of which went a genius which, had it been applied to Franklin's great adventure, might have saved the lives of many if not all of the 123 British seamen who never saw England again. Yet even this expedition of Kane's did not find Franklin, his men, or his ships. Kane did make a "farthest north" which remained unexceeded for many years, but most important of all he brought home five-sixths of his men in spite of the loss of his ship. He was able to do so because of the sound sense he applied to Arctic travel, sense which told him that if the Eskimos could live in the Arctic without canned goods or scurvy, so could white men—by living off the land, and off the sea. His journey in open whaleboats over ice and through it for thirteen hundred miles was a masterpiece of survival technique.

Miss Mirsky is a good storyteller and she makes the most of invalid Kane's romantic and heartening adventure, even if she does not give the detailed biographical background which would make an adequate setting.

3. SCIENTIST

"William H. Welch and the Rise of Modern Medicine," by Donald Fleming (Little, Brown, 216 pp. \$3), tells of the life and influence of a physician whose work reached far beyond the confines of Johns Hopkins, where he taught more than half a century ago. Below it is reviewed by Russell S. Bowles, M. D., professor of clinical medicine at the University of Pennsylvania.

By Russell S. Bowles, M.D.

THROUGH a series of thirteen essays, rather than a biography in the conventional sense, Donald Fleming appraises the technical and scientific attainments of one of the

pioneers of modern American medicine in "William H. Welch and the Rise of Modern Medicine." In interesting fashion he tells something about Dr. Welch's ancestry (at least eight of his forebears were Connecticut Yankee physicians) and training (engineering and medicine at Yale, Columbia and abroad) before he settled down at Johns Hopkins as dean of the medical faculty and director of its school of hygiene, and then spent the last decades of his life in the influential post of chairman of the board of the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research.

It would take several volumes the size of Mr. Fleming's book to do justice to Welch's scientific activities and accomplishments. Sometime someone should publish a separate evaluation of this sort: to attempt to do this in a biography does justice to neither.

One does not get far into Mr. Fleming's book before he senses that the author has a hero worship for his subject. Perhaps it would have been better if he had allowed the reader to judge for himself whether Welch was a hero. Time will tell just what kind of a "rise" of modern medicine occurred under Welch's influence. It is he who was largely responsible for turning medicine over to the scientists to such an extent that today clinical and personal standards are often subordinated and distorted in medical practice. Under his influence "rise" undoubtedly did occur in the field of public health, in which interest was initiated and rapidly promoted through the Rockefeller Institute.

In adopting the German pattern of medical education, Welch was largely instrumental in placing emphasis on the laboratory instead of the patient. He was an exponent of de-emphasis on the personality of the teacher of

medicine which, as his biographer points out, was consistent with his "own character and temperament." It also explains his ultimate endorsement of the "full-time" (no private practice) policy for the medical faculty of Johns Hopkins University. His contemporary Dr. William Osler maintained that "full-time" would probably lead to the production of "a set of clinical prigs, the boundary of whose horizon would be the laboratory, and whose only human interest would be research." In line with the academic and scientific trend, the requirements for admission to the Johns Hopkins Medical School became such that Osler summed them up by saying, "Welch, we are lucky to get in as professors, for I am sure that neither you nor I could ever get in as students."

That time has already begun to reveal that the Welch conception of medicine as developed at the Johns Hopkins School was not an altogether wholesome and enduring "rise" in medicine is being attested by the intensive reappraisal of medical education being carried on at the present time—the obvious intent being to bring the student back to the patient and develop in him an awareness of human values in medicine. So eventually it may develop that Fleming's hero was a hero for a time but maybe not for all time; which is good reason why a biographer should assess his subject in relation to his times.

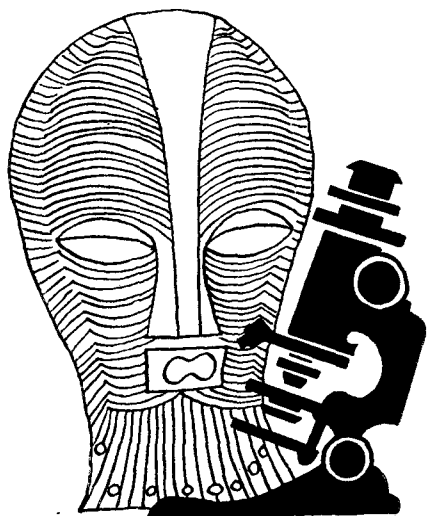
Mr. Fleming might have helped us to understand Welch better if he had told us more about him as a human being. For example, it would be helpful to have had his attitude toward women appraised. Was his destiny guided by the loss of his mother when he was only six months old? Why was he so vigorously opposed to co-education for women in medicine at Johns Hopkins, even though his hostility might have cost the school the loss of a \$100,000 gift? Was it really because he would be "troubled at the thought of saying things in the classroom that women would regard as indelicate"? Of course, girls have changed since then, but even in his day he stood very much alone in respect to the girl problem. In speaking of girls (he never did marry), why did he shun so rudely the four love-lies of Baltimore society who were invited for his enlightenment? And what about those geisha girls at the little secluded inn at Tadotsu, Japan, where he chose to spend the night even though it meant leaving the Flexners, with whom he was traveling?

In alluding to Welch's political and social attitudes, Mr. Fleming gives the impression that he should be



THE SERIES: A few years ago—1951, to be exact—Little, Brown & Company, Boston, and Oscar Handlin, Cambridge, got together to discuss biography. It could stand a little retooling, they agreed. Little, Brown thereupon mentioned that it was interested in publishing a new series of biographies of Americans, a project which, it turned out, was exactly what the Handlin theory of biography had been restlessly waiting around for. The result was "The Library of American Biography," which opened for business a couple of months ago with the publication of 5,000 copies of Bruce Catton's "U. S. Grant and the American Military Tradition." It got fine reviews. Five other biographies are following in quick succession.

Handlin, who is editor of the series (he selects the biographers, writes the prefaces) is a stocky, productive, thirty-eight-year-old associate professor of history at Harvard (he teaches *History 166*—"The Immigrant in American History"—among other courses.) Back in 1952, his book, "The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations That Made the American People," won the Pulitzer Prize for history. Biography has always fascinated him, and in his discussions with Little, Brown he remarked that he felt there was a loophole in biography. "It has no consistent theory," he declared. Handlin's own theory revolves chiefly around the idea of "interaction." "The proper problem for the biographer is to assess the role of men in history," he says. "His subject is not the complete man or the complete society, but the points at which the two interact. At these points, the situation can throw light on the character of the individual, and the individual's reaction can illuminate the situation. The heaping up of such biographies would not therefore provide a complete history of a society. But it would provide a succession of insights into the critical developments in its political, cultural, social, and economic life. A series of such books would thus contribute to the understanding of both our past and of the men in our past." —BERNARD KALB.



WB